

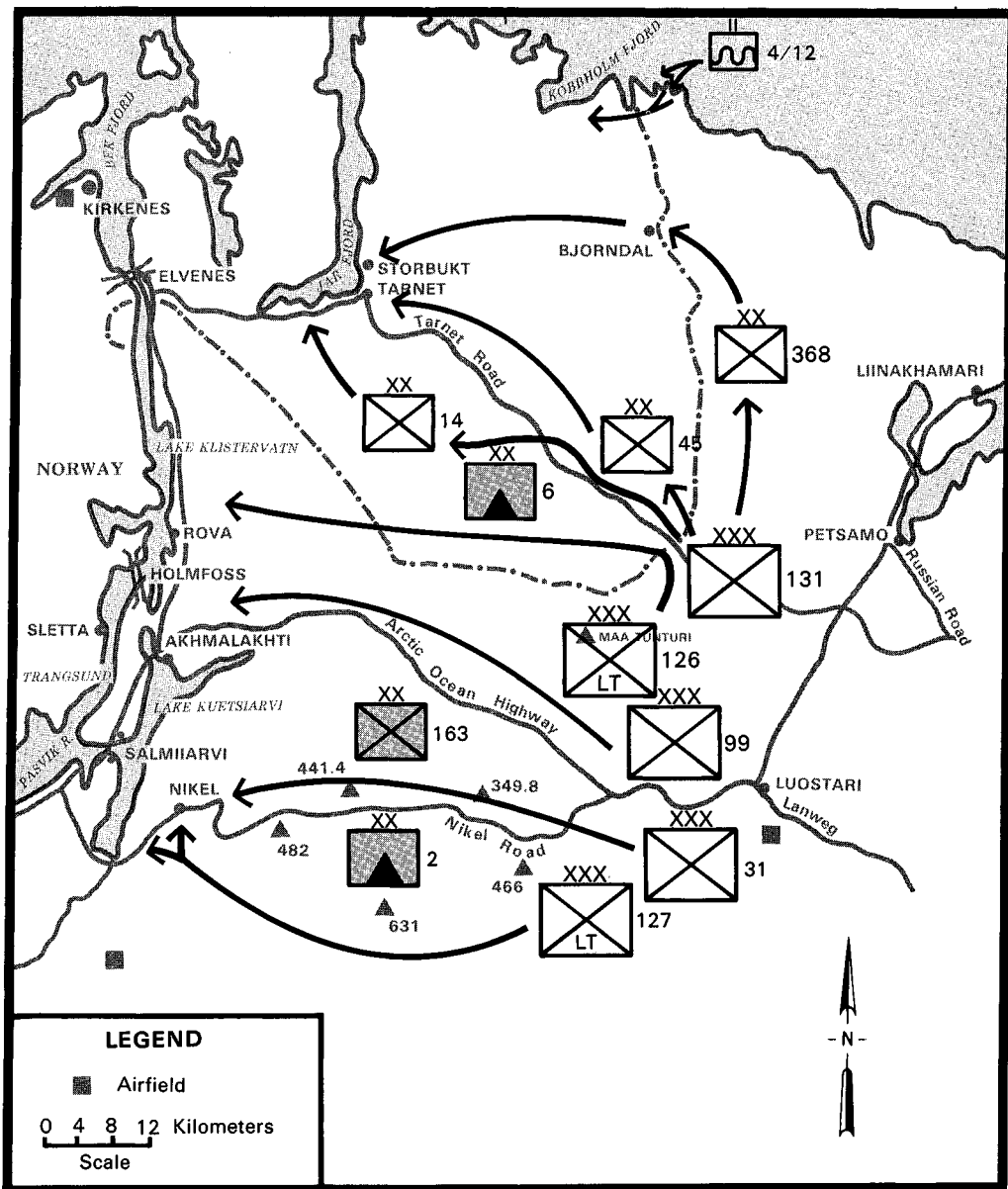
The Battle, Phase Two, 18—22 October 1944



As the Soviet 14th Army paused after the capture of Petsamo, Colonel General Rendulic personally visited the battle area to assess the situation. On 15 October, after consulting with General Jodl, the XIX Mountain Corps commander, and General Ruebel, the 163d Infantry Division commander, at Ruebel's command post, Rendulic ordered the 6th Mountain Division to defend the Kirkenes axis, Battle Group Ruebel to defend the roads east of Akhmalakhti and Nikel, and the 2d Mountain Division to assemble at Salmiiarvi to subsequently support Battle Group Ruebel. Rendulic's intent was to hold Kirkenes as long as possible in order to permit the continued evacuation of supplies. General Rendulic rejected a request from the commander of the XXXVI Mountain Corps for operational control of Battle Group Ruebel, leaving General Jodl in full command of the defensive battle. The XIX Mountain Corps staff correctly discerned that the main Soviet effort would be directed against Battle Group Ruebel and anticipated that the offensive would resume on the morning of 18 October.¹

Meanwhile, Soviet units were busy resupplying, reorganizing, and repositioning. The air delivery of supplies to the Luostari airfield, which had begun soon after its capture on 12 October, continued unabated until 19 October, with a total of eighty-six tons of various commodities being delivered, much of it for the 126th Light Rifle Corps.² Soviet forces continued to push reconnaissance elements forward in their sectors, clearing away German stragglers and determining the locations of German defensive positions. In the area west and northwest of Petsamo, the 131st Rifle Corps pushed forward to the Norwegian border and then halted. In the zone west of Luostari, Soviet troops of the 99th Rifle Corps attacked the German covering forces along Arctic Ocean Highway and drove them back into the German main defensive positions.

Lieutenant General Shcherbakov, the 14th Army commander, moved all five of his rifle corps into a single echelon (see map 7).³ In the north, the 131st Rifle Corps was deployed along and north of Tarnet Road. This corps now had three rifle divisions, having received the 45th from Group Pigarevich. The 14th Army also gave the 131st Rifle Corps an unspecified quantity of multiple rocket launcher systems⁴ and, for armor support, the 7th Guards Tank Brigade.⁵ The engineer support to the corps included the



Map 7. Phase two of the Soviet offensive

275th Separate Special-Purpose Motorized Battalion, which was equipped with over ninety American 2½-ton amphibians.

Initially, the 131st's mission was to protect the right flank of the renewed offensive by clearing the zone along the Norwegian border from the Barents Sea coast to the westward turn of the border south of Tarnet Road. In order to pursue the fleeing German units into Norway, General Meretskov, the Karelian Front commander, requested permission from STAVKA late on 17 October or early on 18 October to cross the Norwegian

border. When *STAVKA* gave this permission on 18 October, the 131st Rifle Corps' mission was changed.⁶ Now the 131st was to conduct a supporting attack northwestward along the axis of Tarnet Road and pursue the retreating German units into Norway toward the port of Kirkenes.

The 99th Rifle Corps commander, General Mikulskii, consolidated his three rifle divisions—the 10th Guards from the Petsamo area, the 65th, and the 114th—west of Luostari and prepared them to advance along the axis of Arctic Ocean Highway toward Akhmalakhti and the Norwegian border at the Pasvik River west of there. The 73d Separate Guards Heavy Tank Regiment, equipped with KV tanks, and the 339th Guards Heavy Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment, equipped with JSU-152s, provided armor support. The corps still had a battalion of ¼-ton jeep amphibians, as well as a heavy pontoon bridge battalion. Lieutenant General Shcherbakov ordered the 126th Light Rifle Corps to support the 99th Rifle Corps on the 99th's northern flank.

South of the 99th Rifle Corps, along the Luostari axis, the 31st Rifle Corps was still east of the Titovka River in the 14th Army second echelon on 16 October. The 31st Rifle Corps had been assigned to the 14th Army on 27 September, and its last units closed on the Murmansk area on 7 October, the day the offensive began. One of its rifle divisions, the 45th, was immediately detached and sent to Lieutenant General Pigarevich at the Litsa front, leaving the corps with two rifle divisions, the 83d and the 367th. Each of these divisions consisted of three rifle regiments and an artillery regiment and had approximately 6,000 men. (For a complete table of organization and equipment listing of the 31st Rifle Corps, see appendix F.)

The 31st Rifle Corps had little combat experience, having spent the entire eighteen months of its existence in the relatively quiet Karelian Front. The troops were fully acclimated and trained for operations in the swampy forests of central Karelia but found the mountainous terrain around Murmansk to be much more difficult. During phase one, as part of the 14th Army second echelon, the 31st Rifle Corps units had constructed and repaired roads and, at the same time, became familiar with the unique terrain of the area. According to the corps commander, Major General Absaliyamov, his troops were sufficiently prepared to successfully accomplish their combat missions by the time of their commitment in phase two. A severe shortage of serviceable trucks, however, weakened the corps' logistic readiness for combat. Artillery ammunition, hand grenades, provisions and forage, and petroleum products were still in short supply when phase two commenced.⁷

On 16 October, the 83d Rifle Division was still in its assembly area forty kilometers southeast of Luostari. The 367th Rifle Division, which had been repairing and constructing roads in the army rear area, was twenty to thirty kilometers southeast of Luostari. On the night of 16–17 October, under cover of rainy (nonflying) weather, both divisions, with the 367th Rifle Division leading, began moving forward to their attack positions west of Luostari. On 17 October, units of the 367th Rifle Division began replacing the 114th Rifle Division units (99th Rifle Corps) in positions along the

Luostari-Nikel road, a task to be completed by the morning of 18 October. At 0200 on 18 October, Absaliyamov received his combat order from Shcherbakov, the 14th Army commander (see appendix B). Stated simply, corps units were to be prepared to attack by 2400 on 18 October in two echelons along the Luostari-Nikel road, with the 367th Rifle Division leading. In cooperation with the 127th Light Rifle Corps, they were to seize Nickel and, subsequently, the road junction three kilometers southeast of Salmiiarvi.

The 14th Army reinforced the 31st Rifle Corps with two mortar and three artillery regiments, two full regiments of multiple rocket launchers, a regiment of T-34 tanks, a depleted regiment of 152-mm self-propelled guns, and a three-battalion brigade of combat engineers.⁸ The most serious problem facing corps artillery units on 18 October was a severe ammunition shortage. According to Absaliyamov, his divisional and regimental artillery units went into battle with only one-fourth to one-third of a unit of fire (see table 5).⁹

South of the Luostari-Nikel road, the 127th Light Rifle Corps was to attack cross-country in support of the 31st Rifle Corps and to cut the main road southwest of Nickel, thus isolating the German defenders east of Nickel. Lieutenant General Shcherbakov designated the axes of the 31st and 99th Rifle Corps as the main attack.

Although Shcherbakov initially had planned to resume the offensive on the morning of 19 October, his first-echelon divisions actually began moving forward on the morning of 18 October.¹⁰ On the Soviet right flank, in the 131st Rifle Corps sector, the 45th Rifle Division moved forward along the Petsamo-Tarnet road into the vicinity of the Norwegian border on the night of 17–18 October. While this division occupied attack positions, early on the morning of 18 October, Soviet naval infantry, in support of the 131st Rifle Corps, landed in two places along the coast to clear the Germans from the area.¹¹ Just before dawn on 18 October, the 485-man 4th Battalion, 12th Naval Infantry Brigade, landed at two points four to five kilometers apart. With naval close air support, the naval infantry forces attacked westward through several scattered German positions, including shore batteries, lighthouses, and signal and observation stations. By the end of the day on 19 October, they had reached the Norwegian border.

TABLE 5
Artillery Ammunition on Hand, 367th Rifle Division,
18 October 1944

Caliber	Percentage of Norm
82-mm mortar	20
120-mm mortar	20
45-mm antitank gun	40
76-mm regimental artillery	30
76-mm divisional artillery	25
122-mm howitzer	20



Author's collection

Typical terrain along Tarnet Road: lakes at all elevations, many rocks, and no cover or concealment

Meanwhile, at 1350 on 18 October, the 45th Rifle Division crossed the Norwegian border and, by the end of the day, had pushed forward to a strongly defended German position along a river line five kilometers inside Norway. From 19 to 21 October, this division continued to attack along the axis of Tarnet Road against the 6th Mountain Division's delaying positions adroitly placed on dominating elevations. The terrain along this road from the Soviet-Norwegian border to Tarnet had sparse vegetation, steep and rocky hills, lakes and swamps at all elevations, and large dense masses of boulders. By evening on 21 October, the 45th Rifle Division had advanced over twenty kilometers but was still meeting determined resistance from prepared positions near Tarnet.

That morning, the 14th Rifle Division, which had followed the 45th Rifle Division, joined the attack on the southern (left) flank of the 45th Rifle Division. Despite the untrafficability of the terrain, the Soviets attempted to maneuver a small tank force south and west of Tarnet Road with the 14th Rifle Division. This effort failed when the tanks could not negotiate a swamp just four kilometers off the main road.¹² The armor turned back to Tarnet Road and advanced with and behind the 45th Rifle Division in small packets.

The 368th Rifle Division, in the corps second echelon back at the Norwegian-Soviet border, moved one regiment northward to Bjorndal, where it linked up with naval infantry forces.¹³ On 22 October, the naval infantry along the coast and soldiers of the 1226th Rifle Regiment crossed the Norwegian border, the naval infantry attacking westward and the 1226th southwestward. By evening, the naval infantry reached the hills overlooking Kobbholm Fjord, and the soldiers drove halfway between Bjorndal and Storbukt along the road.

During the night of 21–22 October, the 45th Rifle Division seized the German positions opposing them, and by evening on 22 October, together with the 14th Rifle Division and the 1226th Rifle Regiment, controlled the east and south shores of Jar Fjord. In five days, the 131st Rifle Corps had advanced twenty-five to thirty kilometers into Norwegian territory against light to moderate resistance, and the naval infantry had cleared the coastline of German positions up to Kobbholm Fjord. As the German 6th Mountain Division units withdrew toward Kirkenes, they fought delaying actions from carefully chosen positions on dominating terrain.

To the south, on the 14th Army's main axis, heavier combat was being waged. On 18 October, the 99th Rifle Corps deployed in two echelons. The 10th Guards Rifle Division, which had spearheaded the corps' attack on Petsamo, now became the second echelon and was not committed again until 23 October. The 65th Rifle Division, poised eighteen kilometers west of Luostari, prepared to attack along the road. The 114th Rifle Division was in contact with German defensive positions at Hill 234.¹⁴ The initial frontal attack on this German position failed, but a subsequent envelopment

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from both flanks, in conjunction with the frontal assaults, drove the German defenders westward during the night of 18—19 October to another prepared defensive position. On 19 October, the 114th Rifle Division units attacked this position all day, gaining success only by nightfall.

On 20 October, the corps second-echelon 65th Rifle Division attacked along the road on the southern flank of the 114th Rifle Division, and together, these two divisions drove forward five to seven kilometers. One regiment of the 65th succeeded in cutting the road west of the withdrawing German units, forcing them to abandon their vehicles and retreat cross-country. Although the 99th Rifle Corps had both tanks and self-propelled guns to support its advance, the armored vehicles quickly fell behind the advancing infantry due to the destruction and heavy concentration of mines in the road. Vehicles moving singly and in pairs on the road were also easy prey for German antitank guns firing from prepared positions. On the afternoon of 20 October, units of the Soviet 7th Air Army flew several close air support missions for the 99th Rifle Corps and destroyed or suppressed several German artillery batteries.¹⁵

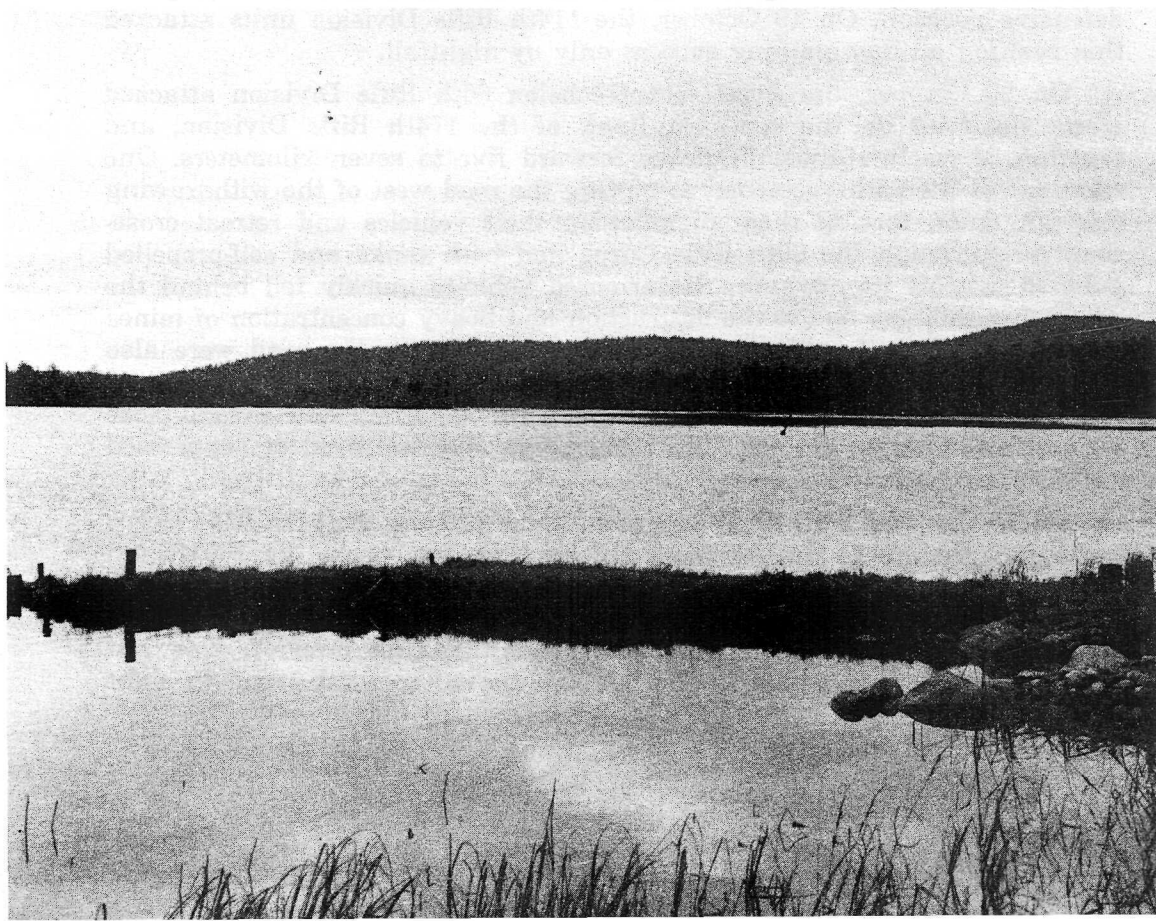
On 21 October, the 14th Army commander ordered the 99th Rifle Corps to destroy the enemy in the Akhmalakhti area and reach the Norwegian border between Rova and Salmiiarvi by the day's end. Subsequently, the corps was to prepare to attack toward Kirkenes from the south. But, due to stronger than anticipated German resistance, this mission was not accomplished in the stated time. The 99th moved forward seven to eight

kilometers and, by evening, was still three to seven kilometers short of the Norwegian border. Consequently, corps units continued the attack that night and the next day, reaching the border and the Pasvik River by the evening of 22 October.

Two regiments of the 114th Rifle Division crossed the Pasvik River at Holmfoss and Sletta, using makeshift rafts and the lend-lease American jeep amphibians of the 284th Separate Special-Purpose Motorized Battalion.¹⁶ The forward detachment of the 65th Rifle Division crossed in its sector and seized a small bridgehead at Trangsund. On the night of 22–23 October, with only limited artillery fire from the Germans, the 97th Separate Motorized Pontoon Bridge Battalion put in a 250- to 275-meter-long floating bridge at Holmfoss.¹⁷ The construction of this bridge was critical to the 99th Rifle Corps' northward movement in the last phase of the offensive.

On the northern flank of the 99th Rifle Corps, the 126th Light Rifle Corps was to perform a screening mission. Ultimately, the 126th was to cut the lateral route that connected Akhmalakhti and Kirkenes on the east side of the Pasvik River. Between 14 and 19 October, the 126th LRC received fifty-one tons of supplies.¹⁸ Whether the corps' personnel losses had been made up during this pause in the offensive, as well as the fighting condition of the corps at this time, is unknown. On 18 October, the corps moved cross-country east from the vicinity of Mount Maa Tunturi and then

At this site, Holmfoss, on 22–23 October 1944, the Soviets placed a pontoon bridge. It came into the photograph from the left. This is the exit.



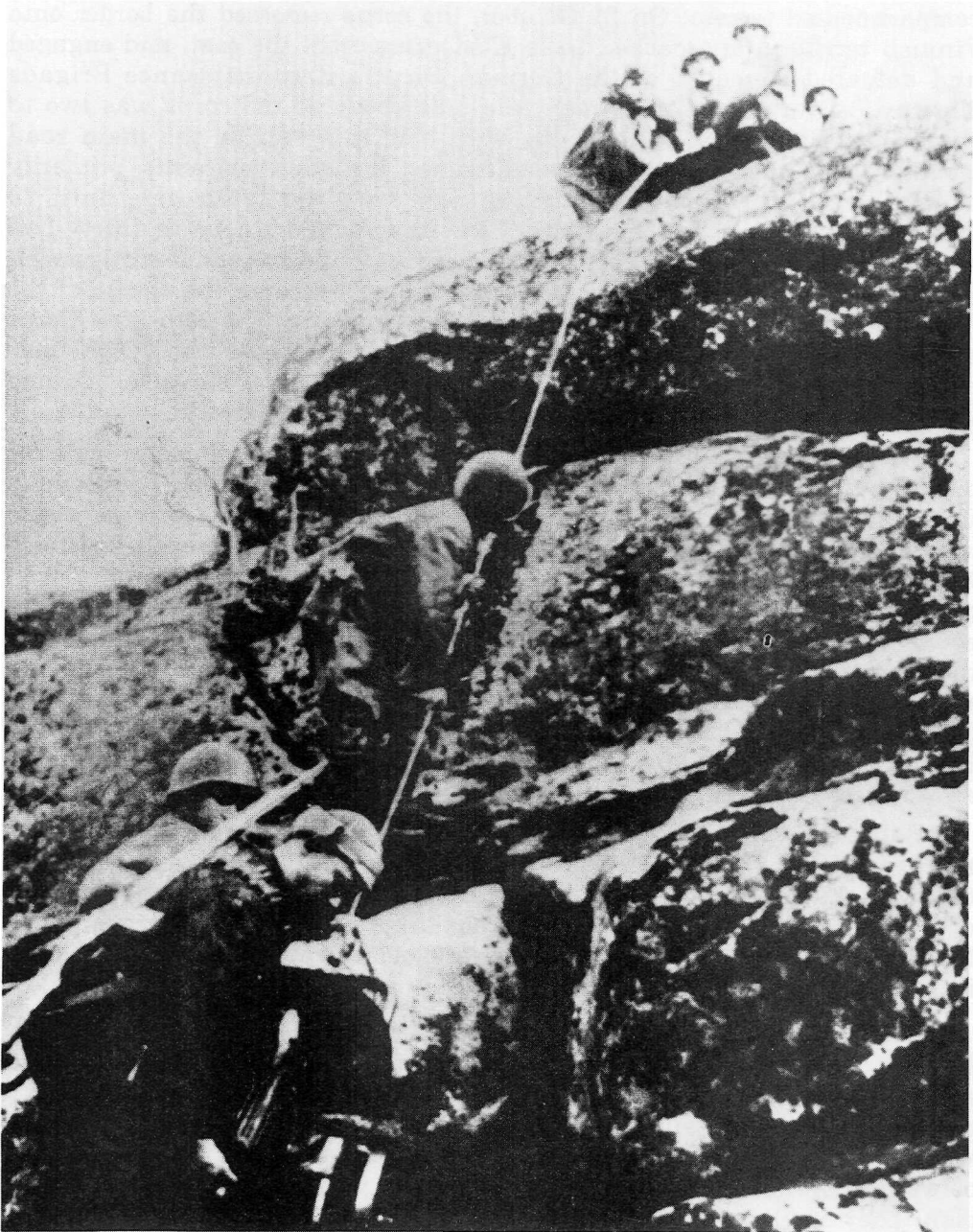
north, crossing the Norwegian border behind the 131st Rifle Corps units on Tarnet Road in the afternoon. Thereafter, the 126th left the road and marched due west, more or less parallel to the border. By the evening of 19 October, the corps had progressed only ten kilometers, against light resistance. On 20 October, the 126th LRC moved westward another thirteen to fifteen kilometers, against little opposition, but over difficult cross-compartmented terrain. On 21 October, the corps recrossed the border onto Finnish territory, approached Lake Klistervatn from the east, and engaged and defeated elements of the German Bicycle Reconnaissance Brigade Norway.¹⁹ By the end of the day, the main body of the corps was two to three kilometers east of the lake, with elements astride the main road leading north from Akhmalakhti to Kirkenes. Logistic constraints, primarily shortages of provisions and ammunition, held the 126th here until 23 October. In four days, the 126th LRC had moved thirty to thirty-five kilometers across trackless terrain and fought a single successful engagement. However, the corps may have had a greater influence on the course of the battle on the main axis had it attacked in concert with the 99th Rifle Corps along the 99th's immediate right flank. Not only could the 126th have added its combat power to the fight on the main axis, but also, it could have been supported logistically.

The heaviest fighting during the second phase of the offensive occurred on the Soviet left flank along the road from Luostari to Nikel. The German forces facing the 31st Rifle Corps and the 127th Light Rifle Corps consisted of elements of the 163d Infantry Division (Battle Group Ruebel), bolstered by additional combat elements from the XXXVI Mountain Corps. Soviet planners estimated the German strength at approximately 15,000 men, about equal to the combined strength of the two Soviet corps.²⁰ In order to delay the Soviet offensive long enough to continue the evacuation of supplies stored in Kirkenes, the Germans were planning a stubborn defense. The Soviets, however, had a 2-to-1 advantage in mortars and artillery, enjoyed the support of tanks and self-propelled guns, and still had overwhelming air superiority.

Bald, rocky hills, interspersed with ravines and swampy depressions, marked the terrain between Luostari and Nikel. The highest elevation, Hill 631, was 1,900 feet above sea level, and several other hills along the axis of attack were over 1,000 feet. Numerous lakes at various elevations dotted the area. The high ground was totally devoid of vegetation and, therefore, in good weather, open to air observation.

Due to the terrain, all vehicular movement was absolutely road bound. The only forces that could maneuver cross-country were light units equipped with machine guns and 82-mm mortars. Marshy approaches or sheer, rocky banks turned even small streams into difficult obstacles. The German troops skillfully incorporated the single road, which passed like a bridge over and between countless swamps, lakes, streams, or ravines, into their defensive plan. They employed mines, craters, and barricades and, wherever the terrain permitted, overwatched it from defensive positions, some of which were used in the 1939–40 Soviet-Finnish War.²¹

The 31st Rifle Corps' first contact with the enemy came on the morning of 18 October, when a regiment of the 367th Rifle Division, performing reconnaissance, engaged a German screening force along the road. Heavy Soviet supporting fire and the threat of envelopment on their northern flank forced the Germans to pull back while giving little resistance. The Soviet



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Soviet soldiers moving a 7.62-mm Maxim machine gun

regiment continued to push forward until strong German fire from Hill 466, overlooking the road, halted it some six to seven kilometers from the starting point. The 367th's remaining two regiments, instead of engaging the enemy, became stacked up on the road behind the lead regiment. The tanks and self-propelled artillery supporting the lead regiment were unable to deploy on either side of the road and were forced to fire from selected positions, thus assuming the role of infantry support.²²

The rapid fallback of the German screen and the lack of additional reconnaissance reports led the 14th Army commander to conclude that the Germans would continue retreating. So, during the afternoon of 18 October, Lieutenant General Shcherbakov changed his previous order and directed that Nikel be captured on 19 October instead of 21 October. Major General Absaliyamov, the 31st Rifle Corps commander, altered his plan and issued his own order (see appendix C).

In accordance with the Soviet commanders' assumptions and orders, the 367th Rifle Division commander organized his forces for pursuit rather than attack, with two regiments up and one back. Of the 31st's six rifle regiments, only two would thus be in contact; the remainder would follow with be-prepared-type missions.

The events of 19 October proved the inaccuracy of Soviet assumptions and the inadequacy of Soviet reconnaissance. The Germans were in no hurry to leave and continued to defend each carefully sited and prepared position. The 367th Rifle Division attacked at 0900 on 19 October with just one reinforced regiment but did not defeat Hills 466 and 349.8 until noon. Several kilometers down the road, the Germans halted the Soviet attack with another strongpoint around Hill 441.4.²³

Another regiment of the Soviet 367th Division, advancing cross-country south of the road, met only scattered opposition and moved approximately twenty kilometers by the end of the day on 19 October.

South of the 31st Rifle Corps, the 127th Light Rifle Corps moved into an assembly area.²⁴ Although the 127th had rested and eaten well during the period of 15–17 October, it had not received any new issue of clothing or footgear. Some of the men repaired their boots with the hides from slaughtered horses. On the evening of 18 October, the corps began another long westward march across the tundra. The 69th Naval Rifle Brigade was to attack Nikel from the southern flank while the 70th Naval Rifle Brigade cut the main road southwest of Nikel by 1700 on 20 October.

The 70th Naval Rifle Brigade moved fifteen kilometers during the night of 18 October. During a breakfast halt on 19 October, German aerial reconnaissance appeared, followed shortly by a flight of dive-bombers. Four times during the short arctic day, the bombers appeared, inflicting casualties—five killed and eight wounded—in the brigade. The wounded were sent to the rear either walking or riding on horseback. The survivors found ground that could be dug by hand, where they buried the dead. In great hardships, the brigade moved on in a column that extended over two kilometers. When it rained, the men became wet and cold, and at times,

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the wind blew so hard that a man could not stand erect. In places, the soft soil and low bushes pulled at their feet and clothes. When the sky cleared, German reconnaissance aircraft searched for them.

Not satisfied with his formations' 19 October accomplishments, Shcherbakov, the 14th Army commander, issued another combat order at 2400, reiterating his imperative to capture Nikel. Again, Major General Absaliyamov, the 31st Rifle Corps commander, assigned this mission to the 367th Rifle Division. As before, he ordered the 83d Rifle Division to follow in the second echelon and to be prepared to pursue the withdrawing German units to the south along Arctic Ocean Highway after the capture of the Nikel area. One regiment of the division was to assist the engineers in repairing and improving the road.²⁵

On 20 October, the 31st Rifle Corps commander was actually fighting two battles. Immediately in front of the corps was an exceptionally strong German position on Hill 441.4 that blocked the advance of the corps along the road. While part of his corps maneuvered to attack this position, other corps elements pressed forward in the north and south toward Nikel. Strong German fire concentrations drove back the initial assault on Hill 441.4, and attacking Soviet troops could not penetrate the obstacles in front of this strongpoint. Indeed, the engineer troops supporting the corps' advance were busy. The following excerpt from Absaliyamov's memoir gives a good picture of the scope of the engineers' problems.

Thus, for example, in the sector of road from Lake Pilguiarvi to Hill 441.4, a distance of approximately ten kilometers, an engineer platoon that

was supporting the movement of tanks and self-propelled guns removed from the roadbed and some sections of shoulder 230 T-43 antitank mines, 84 assorted high explosives, 42 250-kilogram aviation bombs, and 96 anti-personnel mines.²⁶

Due to severe ammunition shortages, Soviet artillery was not particularly effective against Hill 441.4. This ammunition shortage was chronic and resulted directly from the inability of logistic support units to move ammunition forward. Also, the Soviets' overwhelming superiority in armor was of no great value. Armored columns could advance on a front of one vehicle, which too frequently fell prey to a well-sited German antitank gun. Tanks and self-propelled guns were committed in groups no larger than platoon to company in size, with the remaining vehicles waiting in the rear for their turn to fire. The infantry used armor firepower to destroy hardened German positions. Along with the logistic and mobility problems, the Soviet commanders experienced difficulty in conducting coordinated attacks. Units attempting to outflank Hill 441.4 became engaged and could not execute their supporting assaults in a coordinated manner. Because of these difficulties, Hill 441.4 did not fall on 20 October.

Other Soviet units pressing toward Nikel converged from both flanks to within two kilometers of the settlement in the north and four kilometers in the south. Combat on both flanks was intense, with both sides using close air support. Sometime before noon on 20 October, having difficulty communicating with the lead element of his southern regimental-size pincer, the 31st Rifle Corps commander, Major General Absaliyev, gave up control of that element to the 127th Light Rifle Corps, whose command post was

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only two kilometers from the unit.²⁷ Units from the 127th Rifle Corps did not engage any enemy forces early on 20 October and continued to press forward. At 2400, the 127th LRC commander reported that his corps had cut the main supply route southwest of Nikel.²⁸ Based on this report, the 14th Army commander, Lieutenant General Shcherbakov, believed that the German forces in and around Nikel had been surrounded on three sides, with their backs to the water.²⁹

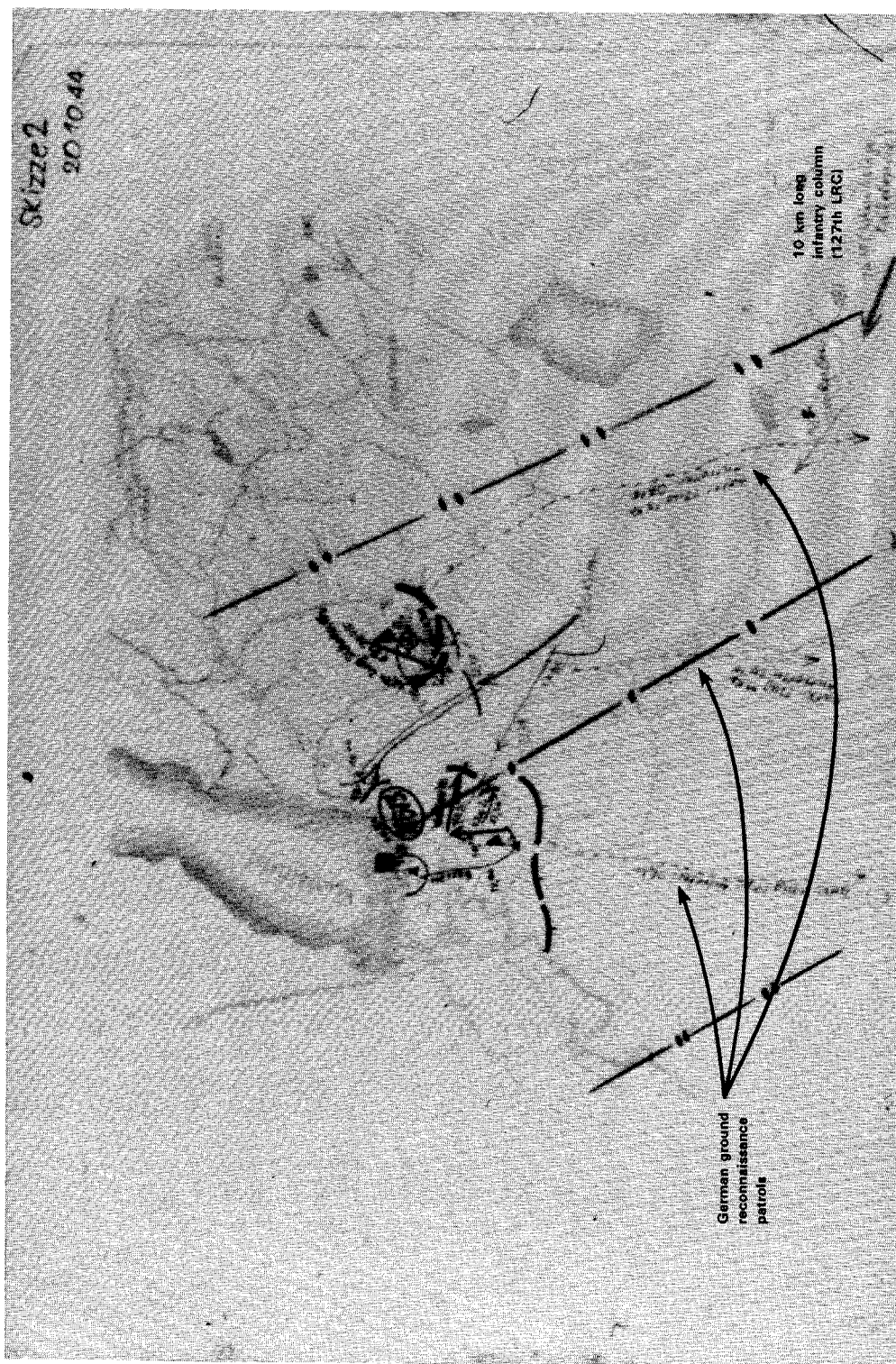
Consequently, Shcherbakov ordered the 31st Rifle Corps to destroy the encircled German forces around Nikel on 21 October with the 367th Rifle Division reinforced with a regiment from the 83d Rifle Division and with assistance from the 127th Light Rifle Corps. He also ordered a second regiment of the 83d Rifle Division to move cross-country and seize the German airfield located ten to fifteen kilometers south and west of Nikel.³⁰

The 127th LRC's penetration to the main road southwest of Nikel came as an unpleasant surprise to the Germans. Alerted by aerial reconnaissance, German ground reconnaissance patrols had detected the main body of the 127th as it moved south of German defensive positions (see map 8). But the forward element of the corps, approximately 1,000 men according to German estimates, avoided detection and infiltrated to the road. The Germans' first indication of a problem in their rear was when, at around 1700 on 20 October, they discovered a Soviet force occupying a portion of the main road about 700 meters northeast of the southeast corner of Lake Kuetsiarvi. In fact, the 2d Mountain Division commander, while traveling in his staff car, narrowly escaped death in an ambush by this Soviet force.³¹

On the morning of 21 October, in a coordinated effort led by the commander of the 137th Mountain Rifle Regiment, a composite German force attacked and destroyed the Soviet forward element, thus clearing the road. The Germans claimed to have killed or captured about 850 men, including the Soviet battalion commander and his commissar. Another 150 Soviets escaped to the northeast. The Germans lost approximately 100 men.³² As a result of this German tactical victory, 1,000 German troops fighting in the Nikel area were able to withdraw later on 21 October.

On 21 October, Soviet units attacked the German strongpoints in front of Nikel again and, before noon, pushed past Hill 441.4, only to be halted at Hill 482. The 367th Rifle Division finally defeated this position by 1900 and continued to attack westward, still two to three kilometers east of Nikel. Meanwhile, the 127th Light Rifle Corps closed in on Nikel from the south. However, even with close air support, the 31st and 127th Light Rifle Corps could not quickly destroy the German defenders in and around the settlement and mine works. There were indications though that a German withdrawal was imminent. Beginning on the afternoon of 21 October, the Soviets heard loud explosions and saw large fires in Salmiiarvi, Akhmalakhti, and Nikel.

General Shcherbakov's order for 22 October called for seizing Nikel by noon and capturing the airfield by the end of the day. Soviet troops continued to attack during the night of 21–22 October, and by 0200 on 22 October, the first elements of the 69th Naval Rifle Brigade, 127th Light



Map 8. Movement of the 127th Light Rifle Corps, 21—22 October 1944

Rifle Corps, penetrated the defenses of Nikel from the southwest. At 0500, a composite force of the 367th Rifle Division entered Nikel on the northeast. Both Soviet attackers and German rear guards fought fiercely. The German main force withdrew to the southwest along the main supply route that had been cleared of the 127th Light Rifle Corps blocking force elements twenty-four hours earlier.

The Soviets eliminated all German resistance in Nikel by 1000 on 22 October. Absaliyamov, the 31st Rifle Corps commander, quickly ordered his second echelon, the 83d Rifle Division with tank and artillery attachments, to begin pursuit. The 26th Rifle Regiment of that division, which by now had wandered well south and west of the airfield it was supposed to have captured on 21 October, was to continue its westward movement and to cut Arctic Ocean Highway. The mission to capture the airfield was transferred to the 11th Rifle Regiment of the same division.

Major General Absaliyamov ordered the 367th Rifle Division to clear the area around Nikel to Lake Kuetsiarvi of any remaining enemy troops and then to release quickly all units not required for combat missions to the corps engineers for road repair tasks. The corps commander also ordered the division to move all its units and equipment to the side of the road so that the 83d Rifle Division units could pass through, and he transferred reinforcing tanks and artillery from the 367th to the 83d.

By the end of phase two on 22 October, the 83d Rifle Division had one regiment with all its attached tanks and artillery on the main road three kilometers southwest of Nikel. A second regiment was northeast of the airfield, and the third regiment was four kilometers southwest of the airfield, marching westward. The 367th Rifle Division units were located northwest, north, and southwest of Nikel, with the division command post in Nikel. One brigade of the 127th Light Rifle Corps reached the destroyed crossing site on the river at the southern end of Lake Kuetsiarvi, and the other brigade was concentrated south of Nikel. The tanks and artillery of corps reserve were east of Nikel between Hills 482 and 441.4.

During the second phase of the offensive, the 14th Army had driven westward another thirty to thirty-five kilometers in five days. An entire Soviet rifle corps was on Norwegian territory, the nickel mine was recaptured, albeit destroyed, and the German operational formation was broken into two unsupporting forces. In the northern sector, Soviet troops of the 131st Rifle Corps were standing on the southeast shore of Jar Fjord less than twenty kilometers from Kirkenes. In the center, units of the 126th Light Rifle Corps and the 99th Rifle Corps occupied the eastern shores of Lakes Klistervatn and Bjornevatn, with small 99th Rifle Corps bridgeheads on the west (Norwegian) side of the Pasvik River and contiguous lakes. In the south, the 31st Rifle Corps and 127th Light Rifle Corps had gained the east bank of Lake Kuetsiarvi. The Soviet attacks from the east and the impassable Norwegian terrain at their backs forced the XIX Mountain Corps

(minus the 2d Mountain Division) to withdraw northward toward Kirkenes and the 163d Infantry and 2d Mountain Divisions to withdraw southwestward toward Nautsi and Ivalo. Having thus split the Germans' combat power into two isolated axes, Soviet commanders prepared their units for the final phase of the operation.
